

# Making Mealtime Happy Time!



Has mealtime become a game of tug of war at your house? Do you spend most of the meal forcing or bribing your child to eat his vegetables? A meal should be a time your family looks forward to spending together. Let's talk about what you can do as a parent to teach your child healthy eating behaviors and make mealtime happy time!

## Feeding responsibilities of parent or caregiver



When it comes to eating, you decide **what** to serve **and when** to serve it.

- ✓ schedule meals and snacks every 2-3 hours (5-6 scheduled feedings per day)
- ✓ serve a variety of foods (it may take 5-10 times of introducing a new food before your child will accept it)
- ✓ make foods simple, plain and recognizable
- ✓ offer at least one food you know your child will eat
- ✓ serve foods in fun shapes, colors or textures
- ✓ moisten dry foods such as meats or hard to chew foods
- ✓ remove your child's plate if he begins to play with his food
- ✓ offer only water to drink between meals and snacks
- ✓ don't be a short order cook by offering whatever food your child wants

# Feeding responsibilities of child



Your child decides **how much and whether to eat.**

- ✓ don't force your child to eat a particular food
- ✓ do not use food as a reward, bribe or punishment (if there's dessert, serve a small portion at the same time as other food, but don't allow seconds)
- ✓ cut down on waste by serving your child small servings to start, let child ask for more as desired (guideline: serve 1 tablespoon of each food for each year of child's age)
- ✓ resist the urge to require your child to clean his plate
- ✓ children balance their intake by eating a lot some days and not much others

At first, this can be hard for parents to accept. But you'll find that if you stick to these guidelines, your child will eat the amount they need, learn to eat the food their parents eat and behave well at the table.

## Other ways to teach children good meal time behaviors:

- encourage participation in meal preparation
- provide children with utensils they can handle
- turn off TV while eating and limit other distractions
- eat as a family, at the dinner table
- avoid conflicts and criticism at meal time
- set a good example



Helping your child have positive experiences with food and eating will help him be healthy for life!



We hope you enjoyed this lesson on  
child nutrition!

Please answer the following questions. When you are done, give this  
sheet to your WIC educator. Thank you!

1. What is one way you could serve a food to your child that would make her more likely to eat it?
2. How often do children need to eat?
3. What can you do if your child begins to play with her food?
4. What is the guideline for how much food to put on your child's plate at the start of a meal?
5. Where is the best place for meals to be eaten?

## References

1. Kendall and Puck. Feeding Young Children.  
[www.ext.colostate.edu/PUBS/FOODNUT/09366.html](http://www.ext.colostate.edu/PUBS/FOODNUT/09366.html)
2. Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility in Feeding. [www.EllynSatter.com](http://www.EllynSatter.com)

Utah WIC Program  
Utah Department of Health

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